

HALIFAX

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Item No. 2
Halifax Regional Council
February 13, 2018

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

Original Signed by 

Jane Fraser, Director Corporate and Customer Services

DATE: November 29, 2017

SUBJECT: Multilingual Service Available Policy

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Regional Council motion dated September 19, 2017 that Halifax Regional Council request a staff information report on the implementation of an HRM-wide Multilingual Service Available Policy that would request all HRM facilities providing customer service (Access Centres, Arenas, Libraries, Pools, Recreation Centres, etc.) to advise in what language service can be provided at that location.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 34(1) of the Charter

Council and Chief Administrative Officer relationship

34 (1) The Chief Administrative Officer is the head of the administrative branch of the government of the Municipality and is responsible to the Council for the proper administration of the affairs of the Municipality in accordance with the by-laws of the Municipality and the policies adopted by the Council.

BACKGROUND

As noted in the Origin section of this report, Regional Council has asked staff to investigate the implementation of a yet-to-be-established Multilingual Service Availability Policy that would have municipal facilities advising the public on the different languages available for customer service interactions.

The municipality has traditionally provided service to customers in English only. This practice applies to services delivered in person, by phone or electronically (email, website, self-serve, social media).

To better understand the implications of implementing a Multilingual Service Availability Policy, staff assessed the current supply and demand of customer services in languages other than English.

The following business units and departments were surveyed (see Appendix A: Multi-Lingual Services Survey) regarding multi-lingual activities/services resulting in 20 responses:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Corporate & Customer Services | TPW |
| • Customer Contact Centres (311 & In Person) | • Road Operations |
| • Corporate Communications | GREA |
| Parks & Recreation | Planning & Development |
| • Parks | • Business Services |
| • Rec, East Dartmouth | Diversity and Inclusion |
| • Rec, Lake and Shore Community Centre | Halifax Public Library |
| • Rec, Prospect Community Centre | Human Resources |
| • Rec, Program Support | Clerk's Office |
| • Rec, Dartmouth Sportsplex | Transit |
| | Legal |

All respondents offer services by phone, closely followed by in person, website and email channels (see Attachment A Figure 1).

In terms of the languages in which customer service can be provided, HRM business units offer printed material, email, and social media exclusively in English. All other channels (in person, phone, email, website) offer varying degrees of ad hoc language support with French being the most frequently used instead of English. Survey results indicate that between 10 – 20 percent of business units offer “informal” French language service delivery through existing staff who have self-identified as having basic to intermediate French speaking skills (survey results show that written French skills are minimal).

The significant exception to this existing situation is the 311 Contact Centre, which offers enhanced language service capability (more than 150 languages) through a contracted third-party translation service. Since its introduction, the service has not been used extensively by HRM customers.

For the 2017/18 fiscal year (to end of September) seven (7) customers utilized the translation service for a total cost of \$110; (five (5) Arabic and two (2) French). Through 2016/17, 15 customers requested the service for an approximate cost of \$205 (seven (7) French, five (5) Mandarin, one (1) Arabic, one (1) Nepali and one (1) Romanian).

Of the 16 Business Units who responded “yes” to the question “*Do you receive requests for services in other languages?*” (see Attachment A Figure 8), 70 per cent of respondents indicated they have received requests for services in French, Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish and Chinese. The number of requests received by each business unit was not specified.

The demonstrated minimal demand for the 311 Contact Centre’s enhanced language service capability service reflects the municipality’s demographics collected in the [2016 Government of Canada Census](#). Of HRM’s population of 403,131:

- 97 per cent of census respondents identified English as their first language
- 2.5 per cent identified French as their first language
- 0.3 per cent identified both English and French as their first language
- 0.5 percent identified as neither English or French as their first language

Of the seven language requests made of HRM business Units, the table below shows the HRM population who identified that language as their first.

#	Language	%
1.	Arabic	1.5 %
2.	Chinese	1.36%
3.	Mandarin	1.0 %
4.	Spanish	0.34%
5.	German	0.30%
6.	Dutch	0.12%
7.	Mi'kmaq	0.01%

A request for information was initiated via the **Municipal Service Delivery Organization** to understand language offering in municipalities outside of HRM. Feedback from those who responded shows multi-lingual service is provided primarily through the same translation service used by HRM's 311 Contact Centre. There are some instances (ie: Municipality of Toronto - <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/council/my-local-government-its-for-me/english-and-additional-languages/>) where some web site content is translated into multiple languages.

DISCUSSION

Should Council decide to create an HRM-wide Multilingual Service Available Policy, effectively implementing it would require a solution beyond identifying municipal staff at a given facility with demonstrated capacity to communicate in a language other than English. Based on the responses of business units surveyed above and the demographic of HRM's population, the demonstrated demand for customer service in languages other than English appears low. Correspondingly, the demonstrated ability of municipal staff to speak and offer reasonably consistent services in other languages is very limited. Implementing a multilingual policy based only on a supply and demand premise would underscore the municipality's limited ability to better serve a very small audience in a consistent and sustainable manner.

While municipal staff do receive requests for service in languages other than English, almost all business units responding to the survey indicated that English-only service is not a significant obstacle for their customers with some exceptions (e.g. the complexities of code requirements and permitting can be challenging to explain in any language, including English); however, most respondents noted challenges related to supporting multi languages such as:

1. Increase in Staffing costs;
2. Difficulties accessing skills & resources internally;
3. Impacts to other customers to redirect resources;
4. Physical environment

Business units also identified the need to provide accommodated service delivery for visually and hearing impaired customers as a higher priority than multilingual service delivery. Additionally, several departments are currently working directly with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to identify solutions to overcome language barriers. There is also a risk that by determining which languages would be supported and which would not, the municipality may cause an unintended perception that it is prioritizing one language over another.

Given the incremental resources required to deliver multi-lingual services consistently across municipal facilities, the low expected demand for the same and the need to be consistent and inclusive, the municipality could explore opportunities to leverage the third-party translation services currently in use by the 311 Contact Centre. By using the same approach as 311 for all telephone and in person customer interactions across HRM, the municipality can measure demand for multi-lingual service and gain a better

understanding of current language gaps for its customers, which could allow it to ultimately make evidence-based decisions regarding future multi-lingual policies and services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

While there are no financial implications to current operations and practices, business units noted unspecified incremental costs that would be realized with enhanced multi-language service delivery including:

- a) re-training of existing staff or hiring of additional staff to address language gaps that may impact collective agreements
- b) signage
- c) Website content and other material requiring professional translation services

The 311 Contact Centre's current translation services are billed at a per-minute rate of \$1.29. Using the same third-party vendor to provide translation services at all municipal facilities could provide a cost-effective means to measure potential demand for multi-lingual customer services and provide a sustainable solution should the municipality decide to implement a Multilingual Service Available Policy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Multi-Lingual Services Survey

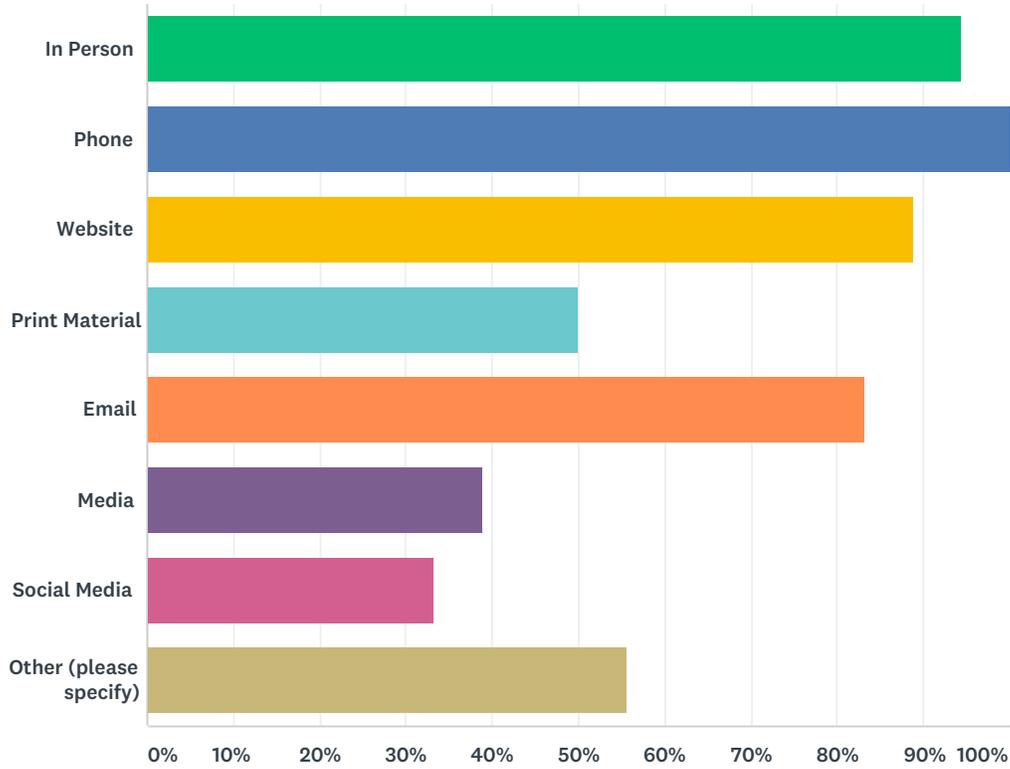
A copy of this report can be obtained online at or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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 Bruce DeBaie Managing Director, Corporate Communications 902-490-2348

Q3 What channels do you currently use to provide information or services to HRM Customers?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Figure 1

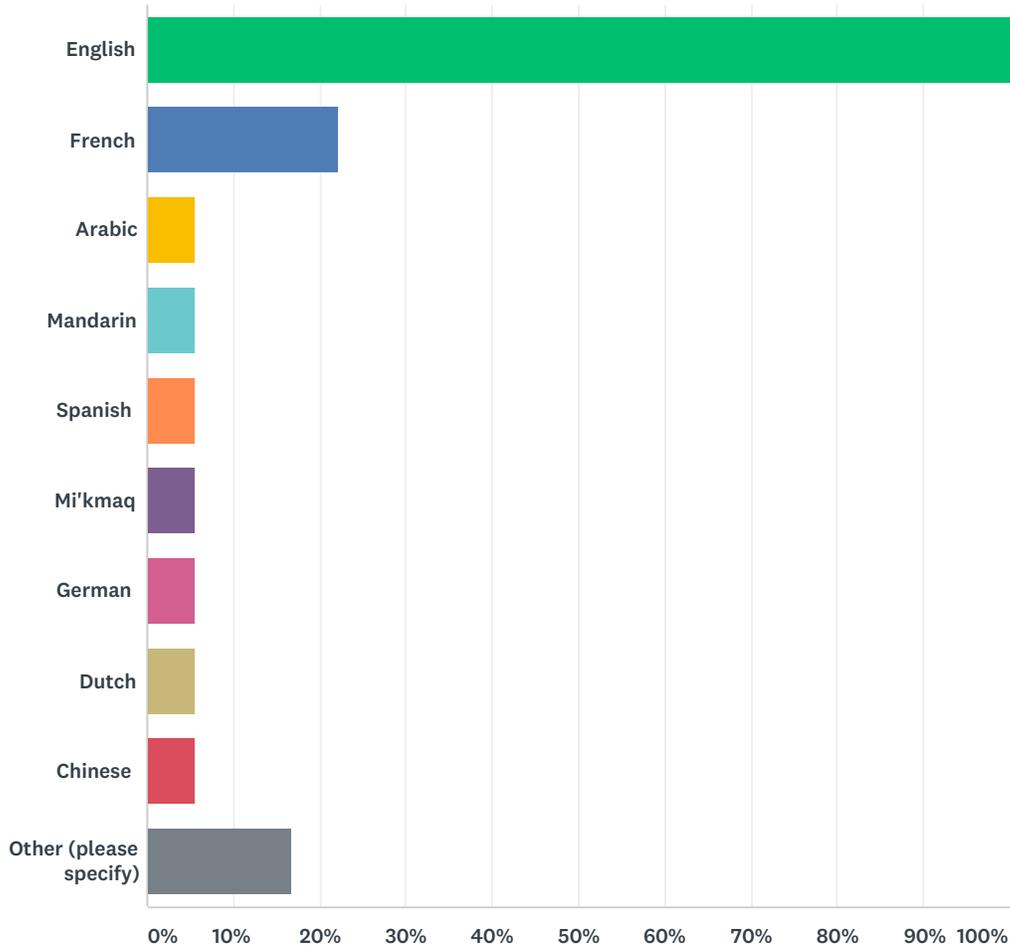


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
In Person	94.44% 17
Phone	100.00% 18
Website	88.89% 16
Print Material	50.00% 9
Email	83.33% 15
Media	38.89% 7
Social Media	33.33% 6
Other (please specify)	55.56% 10
Total Respondents: 18	

Q4 What language do you currently offer services for in person?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Figure 2

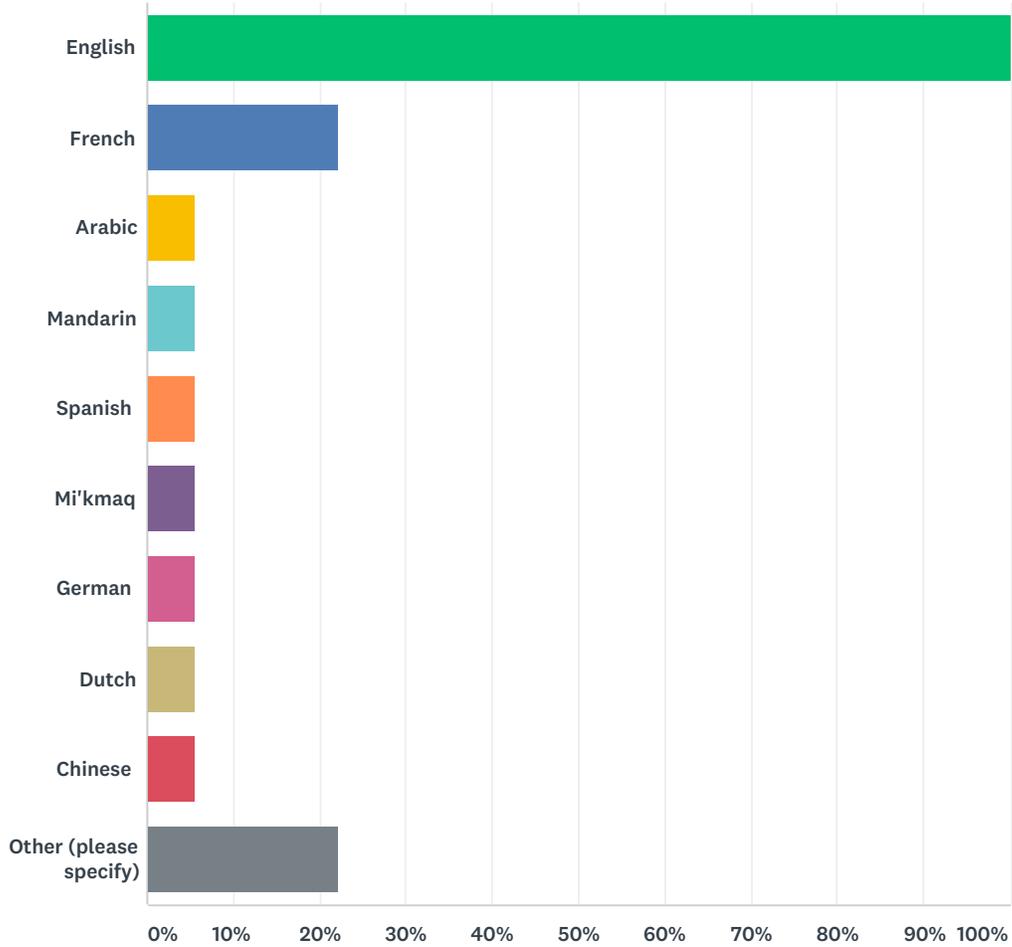


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	100.00%	18
French	22.22%	4
Arabic	5.56%	1
Mandarin	5.56%	1
Spanish	5.56%	1
Mi'kmaq	5.56%	1
German	5.56%	1
Dutch	5.56%	1
Chinese	5.56%	1
Other (please specify)	16.67%	3
Total Respondents: 18		

Q5 What language do you currently offer services by phone?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Figure 3

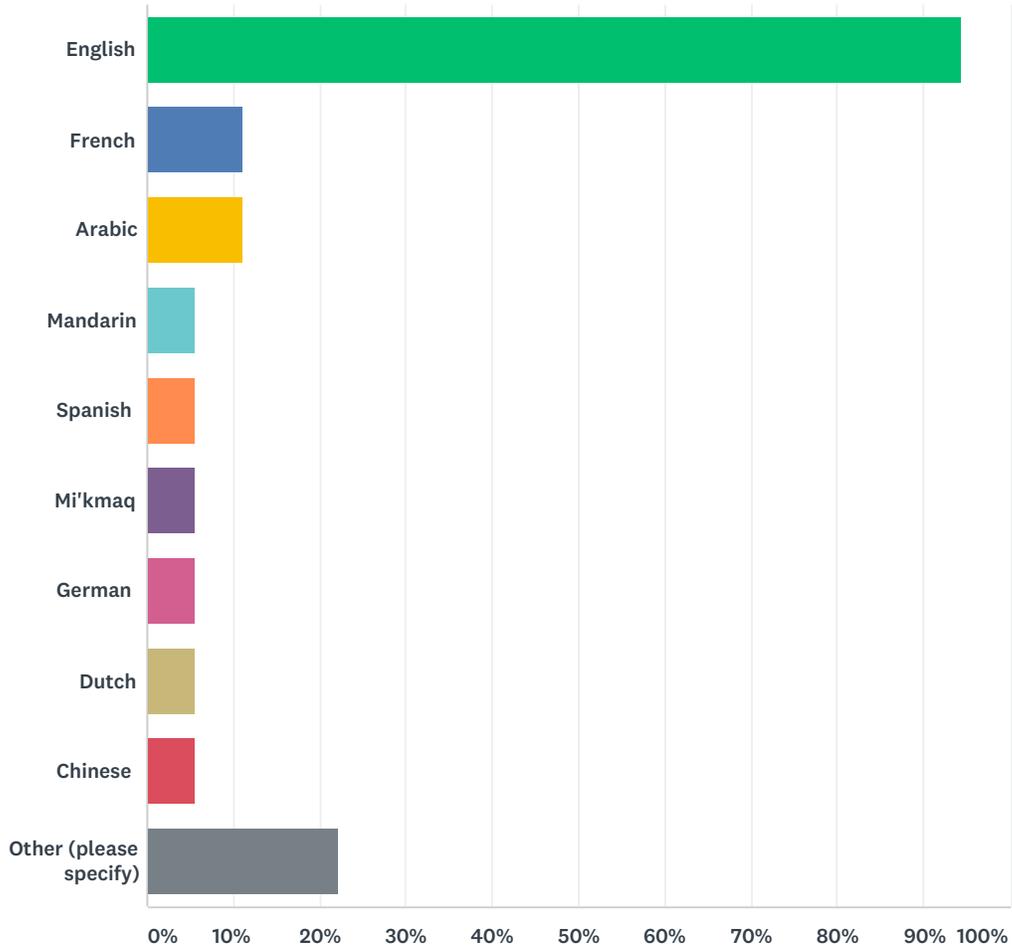


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	100.00%	18
French	22.22%	4
Arabic	5.56%	1
Mandarin	5.56%	1
Spanish	5.56%	1
Mi'kmaq	5.56%	1
German	5.56%	1
Dutch	5.56%	1
Chinese	5.56%	1
Other (please specify)	22.22%	4
Total Respondents: 18		

Q6 What language do you currently offer services on a website?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Figure 4

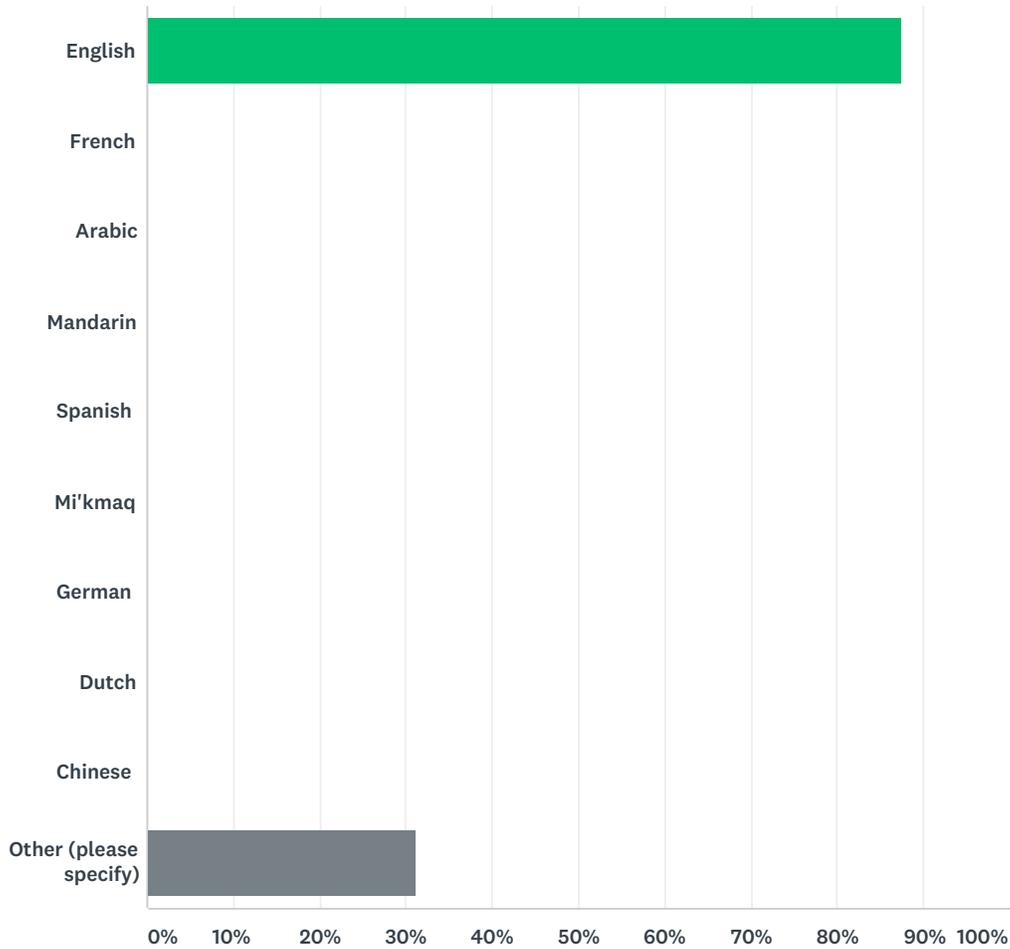


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	94.44%	17
French	11.11%	2
Arabic	11.11%	2
Mandarin	5.56%	1
Spanish	5.56%	1
Mi'kmaq	5.56%	1
German	5.56%	1
Dutch	5.56%	1
Chinese	5.56%	1
Other (please specify)	22.22%	4
Total Respondents: 18		

Q7 What language do you currently offer services through print material (door knockers, rack cards, posters etc)?

Figure 5

Answered: 16 Skipped: 2

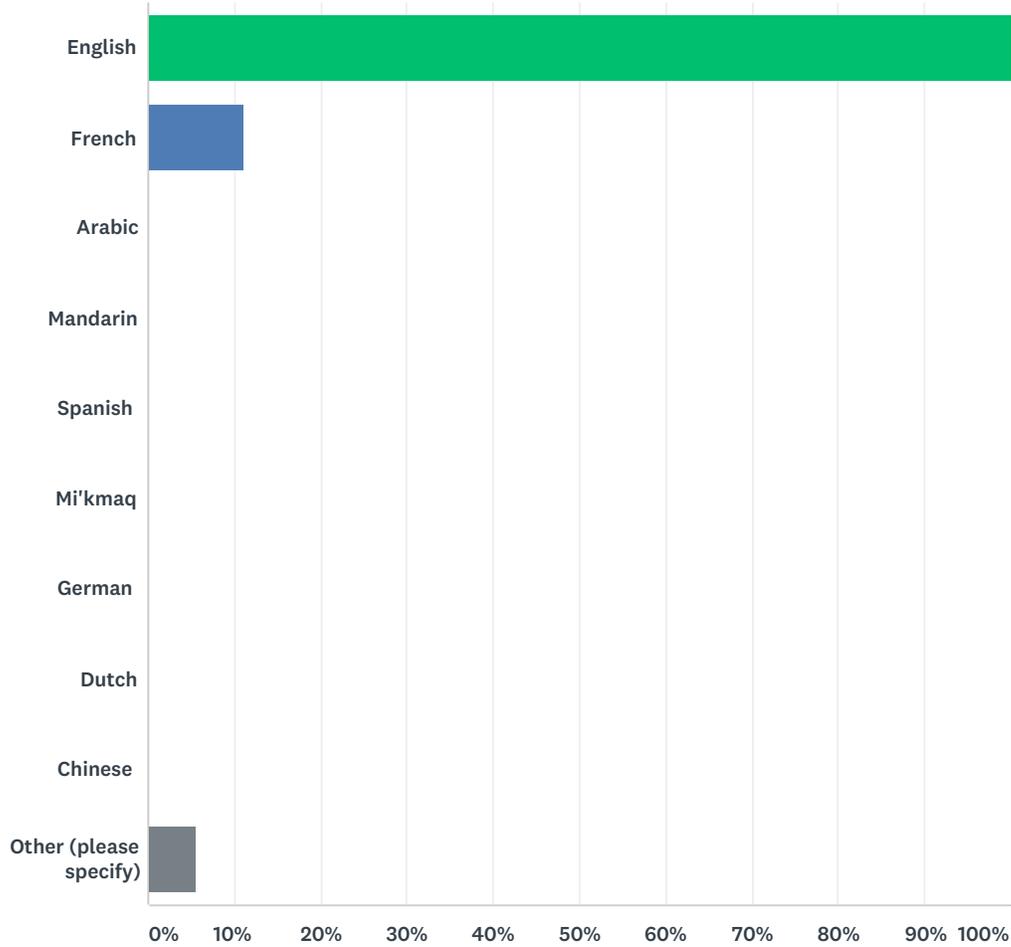


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	87.50%	14
French	0.00%	0
Arabic	0.00%	0
Mandarin	0.00%	0
Spanish	0.00%	0
Mi'kmaq	0.00%	0
German	0.00%	0
Dutch	0.00%	0
Chinese	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	31.25%	5

Q8 What language do you currently offer services through email?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Figure 6

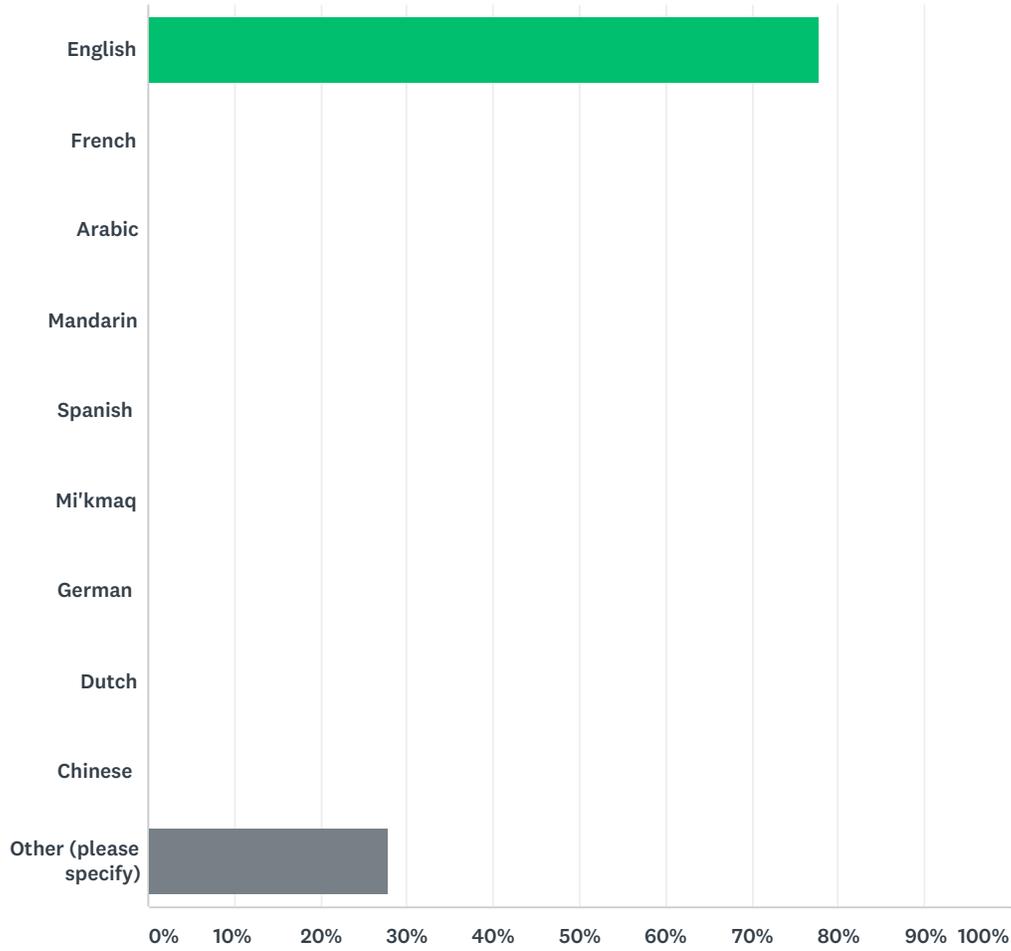


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	100.00%	18
French	11.11%	2
Arabic	0.00%	0
Mandarin	0.00%	0
Spanish	0.00%	0
Mi'kmaq	0.00%	0
German	0.00%	0
Dutch	0.00%	0
Chinese	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	5.56%	1
Total Respondents: 18		

Q9 What language do you currently offer services via media?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 0

Figure 7

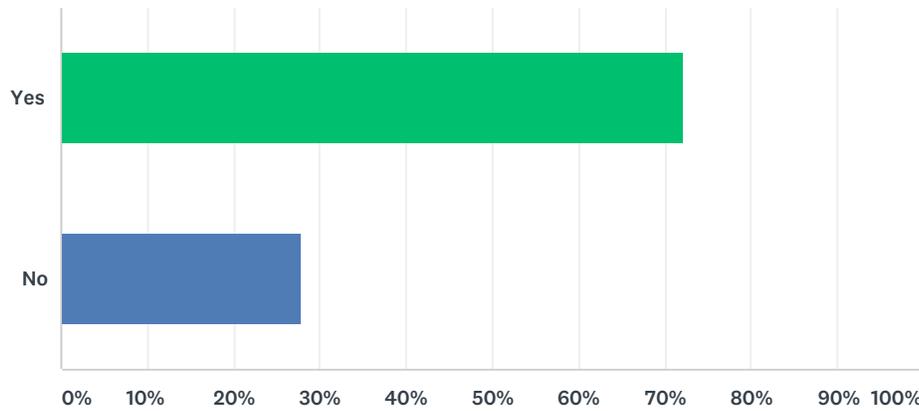


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	77.78%	14
French	0.00%	0
Arabic	0.00%	0
Mandarin	0.00%	0
Spanish	0.00%	0
Mi'kmaq	0.00%	0
German	0.00%	0
Dutch	0.00%	0
Chinese	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	27.78%	5
Total Respondents: 18		

Q10 Do you receive requests for service or information in a language other than English

Figure 8

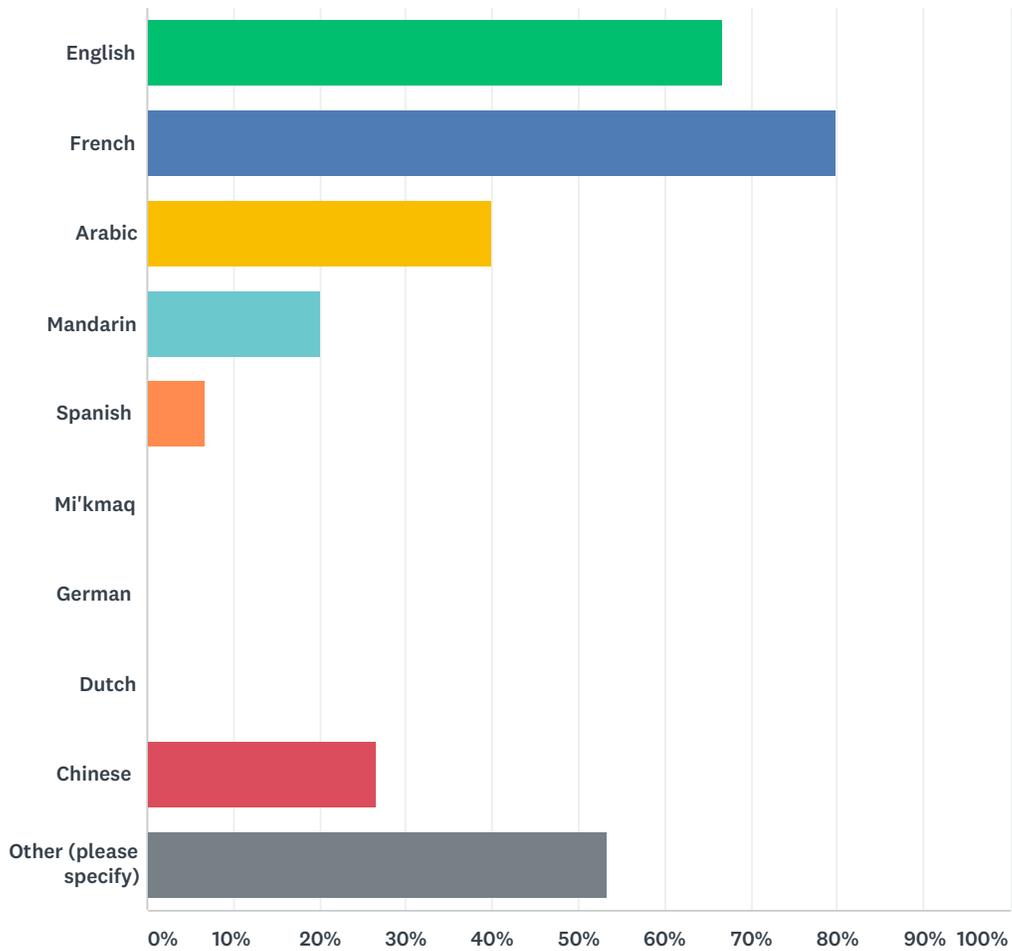
Answered: 18 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	72.22%	13
No	27.78%	5
TOTAL		18

Q11 If you answered yes to question 10, what languages do you receive requests for service or information?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
English	66.67%	10
French	80.00%	12
Arabic	40.00%	6
Mandarin	20.00%	3
Spanish	6.67%	1
Mi'kmaq	0.00%	0
German	0.00%	0
Dutch	0.00%	0
Chinese	26.67%	4
Other (please specify)	53.33%	8